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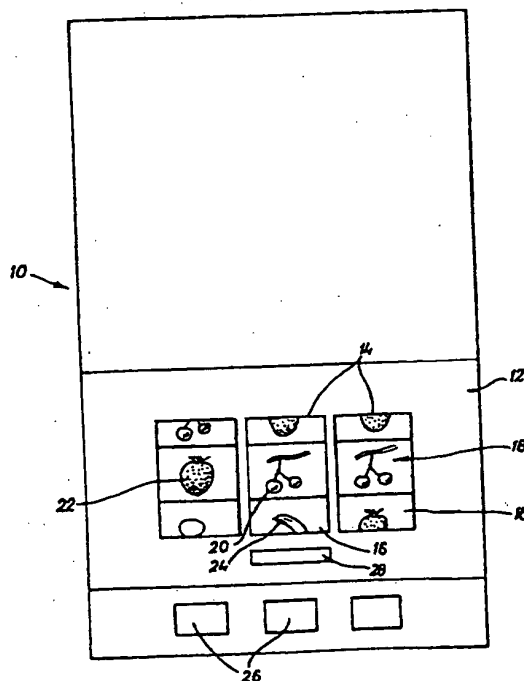
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G4V VAA V118

(56) Documents Cited
GB 2148036 A GB 2135490 A GB 2117155 A

(58) Field of Search
UK CL (Edition Q) **G4V VAA VBK**
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(54) Abstract Title
Fruit machine with means for indicating best nudge option

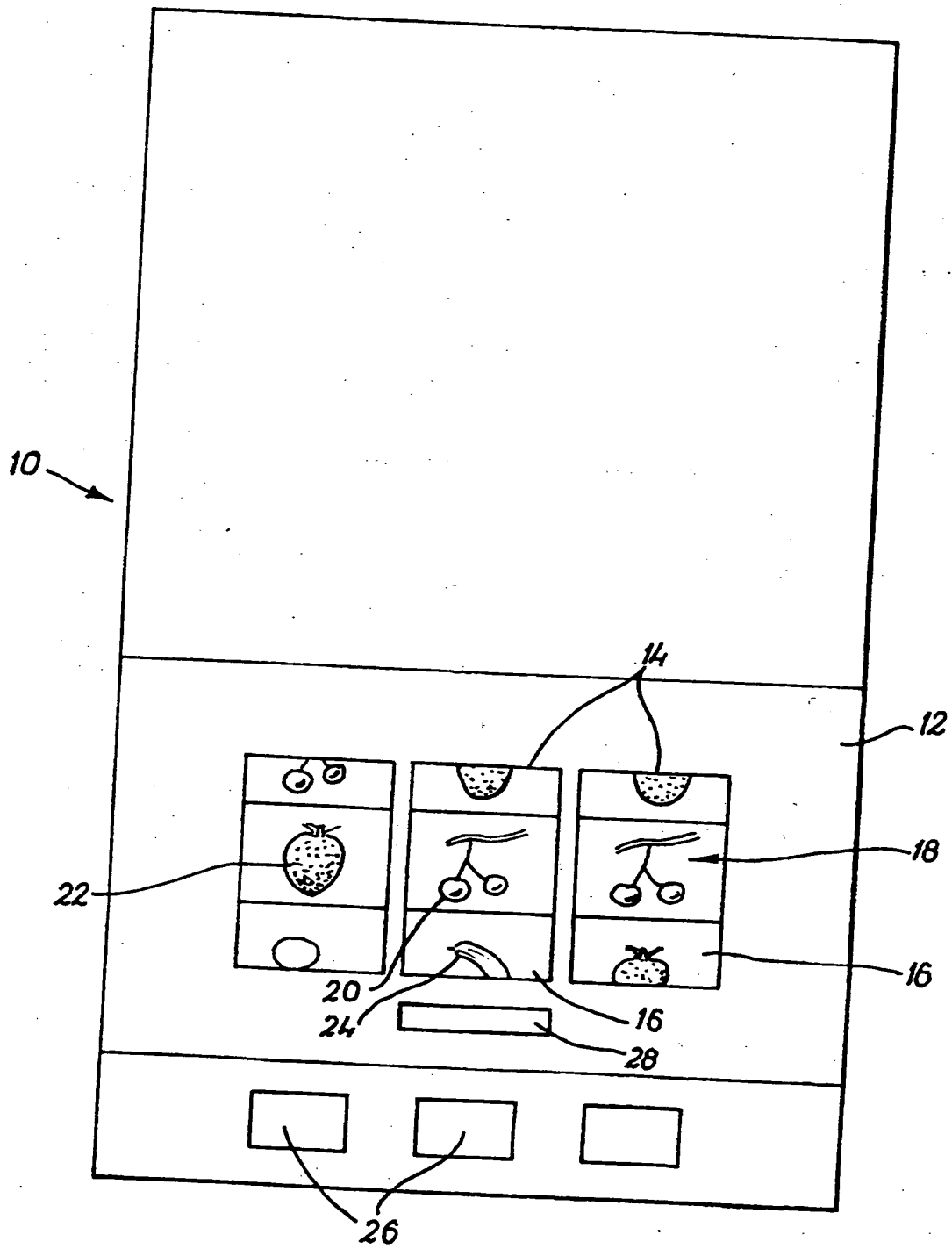
(57) A fruit machine 10 comprises means to permit a plurality of the reels 16 to be nudged and directing means for indicating which reel or reels should be nudged to achieve a win. Preferably all the reels can be nudged in both directions, and each reel is nudged by a button 26 or buttons adjacent the reel. The nudge means may be randomly operable, and the directing means may be randomly operable when the nudge means is operable. A lamp 28 may be provided to indicate when the directing means is operable and, when operable, means may be provided to allow the user to turn the directing means on or off. When several winning arrangements of the reels may be achieved with the available nudges the directing means preferably indicates the best win. The nudge buttons may light up or may flash when operable, and the directing means may light the nudge button or buttons to be pushed for a win in a different colour or may flash them at a different speed. Alternatively the directing means may comprise separate lights which may flash or may comprise a separate display panel or an audible sound.



At least one drawing originally filed was informal and the print reproduced here is taken from a later filed formal copy.

The claims were filed later than the filing date within the period prescribed by Rule 25(1) of the Patents Rules 1995

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GAMING MACHINES

This invention concerns improvements in or relating to gaming machines.

In this specification the term "gaming fruit machine" is to be understood as meaning a gaming machine comprising a plurality of reels, or means for representing the reels, each reel bearing a plurality of different markings which may for instance be of different pieces of fruit. The reels can rotate independently and are arranged to rotate such that at rest the respective markings on each reel are adjacent to each other such that read across the reels, the markings are in lines. Generally at least one such line of markings, the "pay line", is visible to a player of the machine. Usually at least part of at least the adjacent lines, i.e. those above and below, are also visible. The machine is played by causing the reels to simultaneously rotate, and the new combination of markings in the pay line.

If the markings in the pay line correspond to a winning combination, a payout is provided, the amount of which generally corresponds to the particular pattern of markings in the line. Such machines were traditionally called One-Armed Bandits and were operated by pulling a pivoted lever down. Nowadays such machines are though usually started by the push of a button. The markings can obviously be other than fruit, and can show animals, colours, numbers, etc.

With gaming fruit machines it is important if at all possible to have new and different features to differentiate the machine from prior machines and to attract and retain users of the machine. One such feature often found is the nudge feature whereby when this feature is operable one or more of the reels can be nudged down and/or up by pressing a respective nudge button adjacent to the respective reel, to try and obtain a winning combination in the pay line.

According to the present invention there is provided a gaming fruit

machine, the machine comprising means to permit at least some of the reels to be nudged as hereinbefore described, and directing means for indicating which reel or reels should be nudged to achieve a winning combination in the pay line.

The nudging means is preferably operable on all of the reels. The nudging means may permit the reels to be nudged up and/or down. The nudging means may comprise a button adjacent each reel, and arranged such that each push of the button causes a rotation of the respective reel such that the next marking on the reel moves to the pay line. Two nudge buttons may be provided adjacent each reel, one arranged to nudge up and the other to nudge down.

The nudging means may be arranged to only be operable following selective rotations of the reels, and the nudging means may be arranged to be randomly selectively operable.

The directing means may be arranged to be only selectively operable during operation of the nudging means following rotation of the reels. Means such as a lamp may be provided to indicate whether the directing means is operable. The directing means may be randomly selectively operable. Alternatively means may be provided to permit a user of the machine to switch the directing means on or off. The directing means is preferably arranged such that where a plurality of winning combinations are possible in the pay line, the best winning combination is indicated.

The nudging means is preferably arranged such that the or each nudging button which is operable is lit, and desirably flashes.

The directing means is preferably arranged such that the or each nudging button to be pushed to achieve a win is lit in a particular way. For instance the or each button to be pushed could be lit a different colour, could flash, or when the buttons flash to show the nudging means is operable, the or each button to be pushed could flash at a different rate, and desirably faster.

Alternatively, the directing means could comprise different indicating means to identify the button or buttons to be pushed. The directing means could be separate lights, and desirably one for each nudge button, which lights can be lit and/or flash to identify the or each nudge button to be pushed. Alternatively, a display panel could be provided to indicate the or each button to be pushed. As a further alternative, a unique audible sound could be provided for each reel and the machine arranged for the respective sound to be emitted to indicate the button or buttons to be pushed.

The invention also provides directing means for a gaming fruit machine, the directing means being according to any of the preceding seven paragraphs.

An embodiment of the present invention will now be described by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawing which is a diagrammatic front view of part of a gaming fruit machine according to the invention.

The drawing shows a gaming fruit machine 10 with a display panel 12 through which three windows 14 are provided. Each window 14 permits part of a respective reel 16 to be shown with the whole of the markings of each reel 16 in the pay line visible, and part of each adjacent marking also showing. The machine 10 is arranged as is conventional such that the reels 16 are indexed so that markings on adjacent reels are in alignment with each other. In the machine 10 the markings 18 are of different fruits such as cherries 20, strawberries 22 and bananas 24.

Located a short distance below each of the windows 14 is a respective nudge button 26. The buttons 26 are translucent to permit lamps therein to be seen as will hereinafter be described. Between the buttons 26 and windows 14 a directing means lamp 28 is provided. The machine 10 is arranged to operate in the following manner.

The machine is coin-operated and a start button (not shown) is provided.

Following insertion of an appropriate amount of money the start button is pushed to cause the three reels 16 to rotate independently thereby providing a new random pattern of markings 18 in the pay line. A nudge facility is provided to be selectively operable at random. When the nudge facility is operable some or all of the lamps within the buttons 26 will flash to indicate that some or all of the nudge buttons 26 can be used. The nudge facility provides a randomly selected number of times (number of 'nudges') any one of the reels 16 can be nudged downwardly to try and form a winning combination of the markings 18 on the pay line. For instance, in the drawing if the left hand reel 16 is nudged down one there would be three cherries 20 in the pay line which would generally constitute a win. Means such as a display panel are normally provided to indicate the number of nudges available.

The machine 10 also includes a directing means to indicate which is the best button or buttons 26 to be nudged to provide a winning combination of markings 18 in the pay line. The directing means is arranged to work at random, at times when the nudge facility is available. If the directing means is operable the lamp 28 will flash. With the directing means in operation the button or buttons 26 which should be pushed to achieve a winning combination in the pay line, will flash at a faster rate.

There is thus described a gaming machine with an additional unique feature, in that as well as having a random nudge facility there is a directing means which is randomly available to a person to help achieve a winning line.

Various modifications may be made without departing from the scope of the invention. For example, the nudge facility could always provide the same number of nudges, or the nudge facility could be available for a fixed period of time such as twenty seconds. The nudge facility could be available after each spin of the reels, and particularly where the number of nudges available is randomly chosen. The nudge facility may permit the reel 16 to be nudged either up or down, and a further set of nudge buttons may be provided for this. Rather than nudges being provided on all of the nudge buttons, the facility

could be provided on a random number and/or selection of the buttons.

The directing means could be available whenever the nudge facility is available. The directing means could be provided such that it can be selected to be on or off, perhaps by the lamp also comprising a switch, or a separate switch being provided. The directing means may indicate in a different way which button or buttons should be pushed. For example, a different colour lamp could be lit within the respective nudge buttons. Alternatively, separate lamps could be provided for the directing means or a display panel could be provided to indicate which button is to be pushed. As a further alternative, a unique audible signal could be provided for each reel with the directing means providing the relevant audible signals to indicate which buttons should be pushed.

Whilst endeavouring in the foregoing specification to draw attention to those features of the invention believed to be of particular importance it should be understood that the Applicant claims protection in respect of any patentable feature or combination of features hereinbefore referred to and/or shown in the drawings whether or not particular emphasis has been placed thereon.

Claims:-

1. A gaming fruit machine, the machine comprising means to permit at least some of the reels to be nudged, and directing means for indicating which reel or reels should be nudged to achieve a winning combination in the pay line.
2. A gaming fruit machine according to claim 1, wherein the nudging means is operable on all of the reels.
3. A gaming fruit machine according to claims 1 or 2, wherein the nudging means permits the reels to be nudged up and/or down.
4. A gaming fruit machine according to any of claims 1 to 3, wherein the nudging means comprises a button adjacent each reel, and arranged such that each push of the button causes a rotation of the respective reel such that the next marking on the reel moves to the pay line.
5. A gaming fruit machine according to claims 3 or 4, wherein two nudge buttons are provided adjacent each reel, one arranged to nudge up and the other to nudge down.
6. A gaming fruit machine according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the nudging means are arranged to only be operable following selective rotations of the reels.
7. A gaming fruit machine according to claim 6, wherein the nudging means are arranged to be randomly selectively operable.
8. A gaming fruit machine according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the directing means are arranged to be only selectively operable during operation of the nudging means following rotation of the reels.

9. A gaming fruit machine according to claim 8, wherein means such as a lamp are provided to indicate whether the directing means is operable.
10. A gaming fruit machine according to claims 8 or 9, wherein the directing means are randomly selectively operable.
11. A gaming fruit machine according to claims 8 or 9, wherein means are provided to permit a user of the machine to switch the directing means on or off.
12. A gaming fruit machine according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the directing means is arranged such that where a plurality of winning combinations are possible in the pay line, the best winning combination is indicated.
13. A gaming fruit machine according to claim 4 or any of claims 5 to 12 when dependent on claim 4, wherein the nudging means is arranged such that the or each nudging button which is operable is lit.
14. A gaming fruit machine according to claim 13, wherein the or each nudging button which is operable flashes.
15. A gaming fruit machine according to claims 13 or 14, wherein the directing means is arranged such that the or each nudging button to be pushed to achieve a win is lit in a particular way.
16. A gaming fruit machine according to claim 15, wherein the or each button to be pushed is lit a different colour.
17. A gaming fruit machine according to claims 15 or 16, wherein the or each button to be pushed flashes.
18. A gaming fruit machine according to claims 15 or 16, wherein when the

buttons flash to show the nudging means is operable, the or each button to be pushed flashes at a different rate.

19. A gaming fruit machine according to claim 18, wherein the or each button to be pushed flashes faster.

20. A gaming fruit machine according to any of claims 1 to 12, wherein the directing means comprises indicating means other than the button or buttons to be pushed.

21. A gaming fruit machine according to claim 20, wherein the directing means are separate lights.

22. A gaming fruit machine according to claim 21, wherein one light is provided for each nudge button.

23. A gaming fruit machine according to claims 20 or 21, wherein the lights are lit and/or flash to identify the or each nudge button to be pushed.

24. A gaming fruit machine according to claim 20, wherein a display panel is provided to indicate the or each button to be pushed.

25. A gaming fruit machine according to any of claims 20 to 24, wherein a unique audible sound is provided for each reel and the machine arranged for the respective sound to be emitted to indicate the button or buttons to be pushed.

26. Directing means for a gaming fruit machine, the directing means being according to any of the preceding claims.

27. A gaming fruit machine substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawing.



Application No: GB 9805532.0
Claims searched: 1-28

Examiner: Dr. Andrew Glanfield
Date of search: 8 June 1999

Patents Act 1977
Search Report under Section 17

Databases searched:

UK Patent Office collections, including GB, EP, WO & US patent specifications, in:
UK CI (Ed.Q): G4V (VAA, VBK)
Int CI (Ed.6): G07F (17/32, 17/34)
Other: ONLINE: EPODOC, JAPIO, WPI

Documents considered to be relevant:

Category	Identity of document and relevant passage	Relevant to claims
X	GB 2148036 A (JPM) see whole document.	1-10, 12-19, 26
X	GB 2135490 A (JPM) see whole document.	1-10, 12-24, 26
X	GB 2117155 A (THOMAS) see especially page 4, lines 45 to 120.	1-10, 12-24, 26

X Document indicating lack of novelty or inventive step
Y Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of same category.
& Member of the same patent family

A Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.
P Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of this invention.
E Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of this application.

28. Directing means for a gaming fruit machine substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawing.

29. Any novel subject matter or combination including novel subject matter disclosed herein, whether or not within the scope of or relating to the same invention as any of the preceding claims.